

TEXAS INTERNATIONAL POP FESTIVAL

LEWISVILLE, TX

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THE TEXAS INTERNATIONAL POP FESTIVAL – 1969

I. CONTEXT

In 1969, the city of Lewisville, Texas was a small farm town of about 9,000 residents¹. Located about twelve miles north of Dallas, the town sat in the midst of plowed fields and grassland bordered by Lewisville Lake on one side and the Interstate 35 pathway to Oklahoma on another. Until then, the biggest entertainment adventure ever held there was a rodeo or a Lewisville Farmers high school football game. On Labor Day weekend of that year, in the last throes of summer, and in the last gasp of the sixties, a decade of change for the nation and the world, twenty-five bands and as many as a 150,000* hippies, bikers and music lovers would converge on the unsuspecting Texas town. The result was a piece of Texas history that has never been matched.

*Newspapers reported mostly conservative and conflicting numbers of 20,000,² 40,000³, 65,000⁴ and even 200,000⁵ attendees, however the promoters, who lost \$100,000 on the event, insist that there were 125,000 to 150,000 based on ticket sales.

Many of those who attended the Texas International Pop Festival, in 1969, would have considered themselves hippies. While hippies were known for their nonviolence, they were not always treated accordingly, often harassed wherever they went. Such harassment was especially acute in the state of Texas, where hippies were constantly hassled by others. That a pop festival for hippies could be held in Texas was no less than astounding. That one could be held, not in Dallas or Austin, but in a tiny farm town like Lewisville, was unbelievable. As Lewisville has grown over the years, now a city of 89,000⁶ to 101,624⁷, the festival has been forgotten. Few residents know it ever happened.

One certainly cannot tell there had ever been such an event by visiting the site. At the entrance to the festival and to the race track, from the service road of Interstate 35e, there is now, in the form of six-plus-lane Hebron Parkway, a continuation eastward of Round Grove Road, which, in 1969, ended after crossing the freeway from the west, on an overpass. At that point, a large shopping center thrives. At the point where the rough parking facilities for the speedway spread across the field, now sits apartments with a canal and small lake. The apartments continue through most of the grounds where attendees watched band after band at the festival, but end shortly before the spot where the stage sat. The area behind the stage is now under construction for a light rail train depot, Hebron Station.

Some 5 1/2 miles north of the festival grounds, an RV park and golf course keep the campgrounds of the festival from meeting the same fate as the festival site. This is where many festival-goers stayed before and during the festival, skinny-dipped in the lake and watched free live music at the free stage. Still, there is nothing to indicate the history that was made there or at the festival site. The memories of those who attended serve as ghosts that dwell there.

II. OVERVIEW

On the July 4th weekend of 1969, the Atlanta Pop Festival was held in Hampton, Georgia.⁸ Among the attendees was Angus G. Wynne III. Wynne's entrepreneurial father, Angus G. Wynne, Jr. had conceived and founded the famous amusement park, Six Flags Over Texas, in Arlington, and the Great Southwest Industrial District, a sprawling complex of warehouses and factories in nearby Grand Prairie⁹. In fact, State Highway 360 that runs between Grand Prairie and Arlington bears the name, Angus G. Wynne Jr. Freeway.¹⁰ The younger Wynne, born in Dallas on Christmas Day, 1943, was currently partners with Jack Calmes in a concert promotion

company, Showco, based in Dallas.¹¹ Wynne was so impressed by the three day Atlanta festival that he decided on the spot that he wanted to put on a festival of his own. He went to the promoter of the festival, Alex Cooley, and asked if he would join with him to hold a Texas festival. Cooley agreed, and the company Cooley had set up for festival promotion, Interpop Superfest became partners with Showco.¹²

Having decided on the upcoming Labor Day weekend, Wynne and Cooley had little time with which to work. The date was set for the three days from Saturday through Sunday, August 30 through September 1. Labor Day was only a month and a half away. Building on Wynne's knowledge of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Cooley's recent experience with the requirements to hold a successful pop festival and both men's expertise in the promotion of music events, the two hastened to create a team with which to fulfill their goal.

Angus Wynne, being a fan of rhythm and blues music, went to work contacting big name soul and blues artists as well as rock and roll acts. Alex Cooley brought some of his own team members to Dallas and set up shop in the fledgling company's office at the Quadrangle.¹³ He also brought bands; nine acts from the Atlanta festival played in Texas. Dallas-based advertising group, SL Associates, Inc., was contracted to handle publicity.¹⁴ Bands were hired and the search for a location was on.

Meanwhile, in July of 1969, the Dallas International Motor Speedway had opened in Lewisville, Texas, about twelve miles north of Dallas.¹⁵ The drag strip was on the south edge of Lewisville, in a portion surrounded by hay fields and cow pastures, on Interstate 35e. The interstate made the drag strip a site that would be easily accessed from Dallas, and there was ample property to the side of the race track on which to contain a stage and a large crowd. The

track was directly adjacent to the overpass for Round Grove Road with entrance and exit ramps to the freeway.¹⁶ An agreement was made with the racetrack owners, and a site had been obtained.

Conveniently, on the north side of Lewisville, there was a public campground on Lewisville Lake with plenty of room for attendees of the festival to pitch tents between days of the festival. Permission was obtained for use of the park and, along with construction of the stage at the festival grounds, and small stage was built at the campground. This would be known as the “free stage,” and local bands would be brought in to perform there for campers.

On August 15 of that year, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair began near Bethel, New York. In order to learn what he could from that festival, Wynne took his father’s corporate jet to New York.¹⁷ What he saw there impressed upon him the need for a good fence with adequate security. Woodstock had begun receiving attendees before fencing was in place and quickly became a free festival. The Texas festival would be completely surrounded with chain-link fence with security personnel posted inside the perimeter, and only a handful of people managed to scale the fence and get lost in the crowd without being caught.

At the Woodstock festival, the Hog Farm commune, headed by Hugh Romney, handled much of the security with their “Please Force” while Romney himself helped on the stage with announcements. The Hog Farm, along with the Merry Pranksters, another commune that traveled around in their famous hippie bus named Furthur, also helped feed the attendees of Woodstock when food had become scarce.¹⁸ Furthur was a wildly painted school bus that had been the main character in the book, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. Angus Wynne called both groups and asked them to do the same for the Texas festival. Furthur was driven from New York to

Lewisville where the Pranksters would handle the campgrounds and free stage. The Hog Farmers left their commune in New Mexico and headed for Texas.¹⁹

While the Hog Farm handled security among the attendees, the organizers realized that they would need a more substantial, if not official security force on the outside of the festival grounds. Luckily for them, the police chief in Lewisville, Ralph Adams, was planning to leave his job, and had a week vacation coming up. They convinced him to take his vacation to be the head of security for the festival.²⁰ Not only did this solve the security problem, but it would help to keep the local police at bay where they would leave the festival grounds alone. It also helped to stir up a controversy over the police chief.

The chief's actions angered some people within the city government, and pressure was put on the mayor, Sam Houston, to put an end to the festival. Unfortunately for them, it was too late to do anything legally to stop it, so the pressure was on to start making scores of arrests. That pressure was virtually ignored, and both the police chief and mayor mounted the stage during the event to praise the festival-goers for their peaceful behavior. Adams told the crowd that "all the trouble is coming from our good old hometown gawkers."²¹ The mayor himself took the stage to praise the crowd for the excellent behavior.²² Nevertheless, when not on the festival site, the mayor told a different story, stating that the town had been tolerable, but the festival would not be welcome again.²³

Adams was criticized, not only in Lewisville, but by the Dallas County District Attorney Henry Wade,²⁴ and Assistant U.S. Attorney General Will Wilson.²⁵

As the plans went on, despite the lurking controversies, newspapers and radio stations across Texas and elsewhere were paid to advertise the festival. At some Texas radio stations,

contests were held for free tickets given to the person who sent in the most unusual rock, either natural or decorated, symbolizing the rock and roll that would be played at the festival.²⁶ Some newspapers carried articles that warned there were counterfeit tickets being sold,²⁷ a report that was later admitted by Angus Wynne to be a publicity stunt.²⁸ Some newspapers, however, warned that Woodstock had been a terrible fiasco, and that parents should not allow their kids to attend.²⁹

On Saturday, August 30, 1969, the festival got underway as planned, starting with an unknown band named Grand Funk Railroad. Their manager, Terry Knight, had arranged for them to open the show each day for no pay just to get the publicity.³⁰

As stated, the line-up was not only rock and roll, but rhythm and blues. B. B. King played all three days and even played at the free stage. Other blues acts were present such as Johnny Winter, the James Cotton Blues Band, Canned Heat, Delaney & Bonnie & Friends and Freddie King. Rhythm and blues was represented by Sam & Dave and Sly & the Family Stone. Rock and blues crossover acts, Rotary Connection, Ten Years After and Janis Joplin tied the genre together. Jazz was represented by flutist, Herbie Mann, and even a bit of Cajun sound was made by Tony Joe White. Mainstream rock music was well represented by Chicago Transit Authority, Spirit, Santana, Nazzy, Sweetwater and an up and coming blockbuster band from England named Led Zeppelin. Due to scheduling problems, Fort Worth band, Space Opera, which had been hired to play at the free stage, was brought in to play the main stage. Austin, Texas acts, Shiva's Headband and Ramon Ramon & the Four Daddios played the free stage as did The Quarry, a band that had played the free stage at Woodstock and had come down in the bus, Further to play again.

Originally, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young were scheduled to play, but the members felt that their first live performance, Woodstock, was not up to their standards. They cancelled all of their gigs and went back into rehearsals.

It is worth noting that there were many Texas artists in the line-up. Johnny Winter was from Beaumont, Texas. Sly Stone was born in Dallas, Texas. Freddie King, born in Gilmore, Texas, was nicknamed the Texas Cannonball. As stated, Space Opera was a Fort Worth band, and Shiva's Headband and Ramon Ramon & the Four Daddios were from Austin.

As many know, Janis Joplin was born in Port Arthur, Texas, January 19, 1943, where she had been considered an outcast most of her life. She left Texas with ill feelings, and her appearance at the Texas Pop Festival was her first time back in the state since leaving, in 1963, for California and the lime light. She seemed genuinely thrilled to be there, reportedly saying to the crowd, "Where were you when I needed you?" Joplin wrapped up the first night of the festival later than three o'clock in the morning. Unfortunately, she had barely more than a year to live. She died on October 4, 1970.

Each night, the caravan of thousands of cars crept north on Interstate 35e from the festival staging area to the campground. The campgrounds in those days had no showers, so while many of the attendees took to the lake to cool off from the deadly Texas heat, others used the lake to bathe. Bars of Ivory soap were passed around; Ivory being the choice because it floats and could be tossed to a fellow bather without sinking.

To the dismay of many residents, and the joy of others, the young, uninhibited hippies left their clothes on the shore to swim or bathe. So the skinny-dipping began. A number of nonparticipants took to their boats to get a closer look. One local couple, for instance, viewed the

naked youth as “disgusting.” When asked how long they’d been watching the nude bathing, the man flicked his cigar and answered, “about two hours.” As he replied, his wife took the binoculars they were sharing.³¹

The skinny-dipping seemed to be the biggest issue with the citizens of Lewisville, so an emergency meeting was called in the middle of the night, and Hugh Romney was asked to attend. The mayor insisted that the nudity had to end or the people would cause problems. Romney was asked to tell everyone, and he was given a bullhorn and sent back to the campgrounds to warn the bathers. In a half-hearted attempt, Romney pleaded with the nude youths to swim all they wanted, but put some clothes on.³²

Some of the musicians found their way to the campgrounds and the free stage after playing the main stage. One day, Hugh Romney and Ken Babbs, a lead Merry Prankster who was in charge of the campground, were lying on the free stage to rest. In a moment of silliness, Babbs said something about being “Mumbly Wumbly.” Romney replied, making up his own pseudonym, “This is ‘Wavy Gravy’ on the floor. Please don’t dance on the Wavy Gravy.” About that time, B.B. King and Johnny Winter, who had decided to jam awhile at the free stage, stepped onto the platform. As B.B. King approached an amplifier to plug in his famous guitar, Lucille, Romney said he would get out of the way. Misinterpreting the conversation he had just heard, King replied something to the effect of, “You’re fine where you are, Wavy Gravy.” Hugh Romney became Wavy Gravy at that point, and has been Wavy Gravy since, even getting a Ben & Jerry’s ice cream flavor named after him.³³

Much the same as with Woodstock, there were no acts of violence reported at the Texas Pop Festival. One man, John Shope of Arlington, Texas, died of heat stroke; one baby was

born.³⁴ While doctors were on site to deal with the expected drug overdoses, they hardly saw any problems with drugs. Instead, the doctors busied themselves mostly with the cut feet of barefoot hippies and heat-related illness.³⁵

Needless to say, a lot of people believe the festival was a changing factor in their lives. Indeed, it was an eye-opening experience to many Lewisville residents. One case in point, a Lewisville resident, Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, saw a group of hippie youths walking down the road toward her house. She was afraid she and her family were “in for real trouble.” She immediately rounded up her children and brought them into the house. To her terror, one of the young men knocked on her door. He simply asked if she wanted someone to mow her lawn. She eventually gave in, and to her dismay, he did the work, then refused money, accepting only some food for the job.³⁶

Ruth Davenport, who ran Shorty’s Place, a small grocery store in Lewisville, said of the hippies, “They are nice, beautiful kids. They bring me flowers and try to pay me for being kind.” Evidently, some residents of the community discovered something about people who, until the festival, had been foreign to them.³⁷

Still, many felt the hippies should have been dealt with harshly, and a controversy arose after the kids were long gone. Many criticized Mayor Houston for having stood on the stage and praised the festival-goers, many for not pressuring the police chief to do more to make arrests for nudity and the open smoking of marijuana, even more about the fact that the mayor and city council did not stop the festival from happening in the first place.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

There can be no argument that the Texas International Pop Festival affected the lives of many people, especially Texans. The following are quotes, written since the year 2000, by people who attended the festival:³⁸

“It was one of the defining experiences of my young life.”

“Some of the best days of my life!”

“(I) did not realize how historic this event would become or what was really going on, only that the music was incredible and the experience was life changing.”

“One of the pivotal moments in my life.”

“It was eye-opening for me in numerous ways. I was sort of reborn in 1969-70, beginning with the festival..”

“Attending this festival rates as one of the top highlights of my life.”

“A time that DID change my life forever.”

“It opened my eyes, heart, mind and most especially, my ears!”

“This festival started my love of music as I was 18 when I attended.”

“I will never forget the concert that changed my life”

“(I) became aware at the Dallas International Pop Festival. That's what I remember it as.”

“All in all it was a life altering experience and I wouldn't have missed it for the world, especially the after-hours concerts by the lake.”

“I was in the air force at the time so I really stood out with my crew-cut hair. There were 4 of us there for 3 days and we had a great time. Shortly after the concert I went to Nam for a year, but I took those great memories with me.”

"This day served as a turning point in my life. I was never the same after going to this event that hot Sunday afternoon. It was a day of discovery to say the least.”

“Labor Day weekend 1969 changed my life.”

As for the community, with the political controversies that developed from the festival and the people who either discovered that the hippies were just peace loving kids or were determined to keep them out henceforth, the town was never the same.

Aside from the cultural connections made, the music itself was historical. From the return to Texas of Janis Joplin to the debut of Grand Funk Railroad, a band that was virtually unknown before the festival and then rose to be the highest paid band in the world, the Texas International Pop Festival made music history.

The festival also proved to many that the state of Texas had entered the modern world, a world where people of many ideals can coexist. Texas was no longer the cultural desert that many assumed. The sound of rock and roll mingled with country and western, and cowboy hats competed with long hair for the heads of men. Texas joined the rest of the country.

To this day, the Texas International Pop Festival is the biggest thing ever to occur in Lewisville, Texas, yet today few residents know it ever happened. If you go to the Lewisville Public Library, the only place to find back issues of the Lewisville Leader newspaper, you will

find microfiche reels of every year dating all the way back to the nineteenth century with one exception- someone has apparently stolen the reel for 1969.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ 1970 United States Census of Population, vol. 1, Characteristics of Population, part 45, Texas, sec. 1, p. 45-14, Lewisville city, issued in May 1973 by U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Social & Economic Statistics Admin. & Bureau of Census, available through J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, Dallas Public Library: Lewisville population 9,264 in 1970 (3,956 in 1960)

² “Pop Music Festival Fans ‘Grooving’ In Peaceful Ways”, *Austin Statesman*, September 1, 1969, p. 5a, col. 1

³ “Pop Festival”, *Dallas Times Herald*, September 1, 1969, p. 4c, col. 1

⁴ “Police Chief, Mayor Differ Over Welcome To Youths”, *Austin Statesman*, September 2, 1969, p. 2a, col. 6

⁵ “Festival Is Over But Controversy Is Just Beginning”, *Austin Statesman*, September 4, 1969, p. 6a, col. 2

⁶ “About Lewisville, TX” web page on the official Lewisville, 2006 estimate, accessed November 10, 2009, http://www.lewisville.com/about_lewisville_texas.htm

⁷ “Lewisville, TX”, website page on Wikipedia, “U.S Census Bureau gives a 2008 population estimate of 101,624”, accessed November 10, 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewisville,_Texas

⁸ “Star Time”, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 20, 1997, p. 1. col. 1

⁹ “Angus Gilchrist Wynne Jr. Bio” website article, posted February 23, 2008; accessed October 27, 2009, Six Flags Over Texas Former Employees Forum, <http://sfot.net/sfot-forums/showthread.php?t=562> ,

¹⁰ Mapquest Maps, accessed October 27, 2009, <http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=arlington&state=tx>

¹¹ “Dallas Life”, *Dallas Morning News*, September 29, 1985, p. 12

¹² “Son of Bethel- The 1969 Texas International Pop Festival” website article, Dallas History Website , <http://www.dallashistory.net/sixtiesdallas/sixtiesdallas-sonbeth3.htm>

¹³ News release, “For immediate release” from Interpop Superfest, August 7, 1969, Georgia State University Library, Special Collections Department, Alex Cooley Collection, box 2/4, p. 1

¹⁴ Letter to Stanley Levenson from Alex Cooley and Angus G. Wynne III, July 28, 1969, Georgia State University Library, Special Collections Department, Alex Cooley Collection, box 1/15,

¹⁵ “Lost Dragstrips- Dallas International Motor Speedway” web page, initially written October, 22, 2005, accessed October 29, 2009, <http://fordflashback.com/dims.asp?28718138>

¹⁶ Aerial photograph for “Rock Fans Groove Till 4:30 a.m.” *Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1969, p. 1a, col. 2-5

¹⁷ Lecture by Angus G. Wynne III, May 30, 2009, Texas Music Mini-Conference, J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, Dallas Public Library

¹⁸ “Thousands Converge On Lewisville”, *Dallas Morning News*, August 30, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1

¹⁹ “New Mexico’s Hog Farmers Serve As Aides To Festival”, *Denton Record-Chronicle*, September 2, 1969, p. 1, col. 1

²⁰ “Security Set For Festival”, *Denton Record Chronicle*, August 28, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1

²¹ “Got No Shoes; Got No Blues” film produced by Bill Rogers, 1969, speech on stage by Chief Adams, 0:24:11, available through official Texas International Pop Festival website <http://www.texaspopfestival.com>

²² “Got No Shoes; Got No Blues”, 1969, speech on stage by Mayor Houston, 0:32:30

²³ “A King-Sized Hippie-Over’ (Groan)”, *Dallas Times Herald*, September 2, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1; *Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1969, p. 1a, col. 3

²⁴ “Outside Patrol Reported Used”, *Dallas Morning News*, September 3, 1969, p. 1d, col. 2

²⁵ “Festival Is Over But Controversy Is Just Beginning”, *Austin Statesman*, September 4, 1969, p. 6a, col. 1

²⁶ Letter to radio stations, from Alex Cooley, (not dated), Georgia State University Library, Special Collections Department, Alex Cooley Collection, box 3/29

²⁷ “Bogus Ticket Reported”, *Denton Record Chronicle*, August 28, 1969, p. 2, col. 2

²⁸ Angus G. Wynne III lecture, May 30, 2009

²⁹ “Nausea At Lewisville”, *Dallas Morning News*, August 30, 1969, p. 2d, col. 1

³⁰ “Grand Funk Railroad Or...The Great Train Robbery”, *Creem Magazine*, vol. 2, #7, 1969

³¹ “60,000 Rock Fans Cheer Mayor, Police Chief” (continuation of article on p. 2a under second heading “Rock Fans Tune In Police Chief’s Praise”), *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 2, 1969, p. 2a, col. 6

³² “Got No Shoes; Got No Blues”, 1969, Hugh Romney aka Wavy Gravy explains the city’s position on skinny-dipping to bathers, 0:28:30

³³ “A Clown for Our Time”, 2002, the official Wavy Gravy website, accessed October 27, 2009, <http://www.wavygravy.net/bio/biography.html>

³⁴ “Fest Spawns Life For Death- Child Born in Area; Heat Kills Man, 27”, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 31, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1

³⁵ “Residents Bugged By Loud ‘Pop’-ping”, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 1, 1969, p. 1a, col. 3

³⁶ “Youngsters Draw Praise”, *Dallas Morning News*, September 2, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1

³⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, September 2, 1969, p. 1a, col. 1

³⁸ All quotes are from emails or guestbook entries sent to the official website for the Texas International Pop Festival, established in 2000, <http://www.texaspopfestival.com>